

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1652

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 19989

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, TH

SUBJECT: BANGKOK BUS STRIKE ENDS

REF: BANGKOK 19798

1. SUMMARY. A SUNDAY AFTERNOON MEETING BETWEEN STRIKE LEADERS AND GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES PUT AN END TO A TWO DAY PARTIAL DISRUPTION OF BANGKOK'S BUS SERVICE.

2. WEEKEND BUS SERVICE WAS ONLY PARTIALLY DISRUPTED WHEN BUS OPERATORS FROM EIGHTEEN BANGKOK BUS COMPANIES WALKED OFF THEIR JOBS. INCONVENIENCE TO COMMUTERS WAS MODERATE AS SEVERAL LARGER COMPANIES CONTINUED TO PROVIDE SERVICE ALONG WITH HUNDREDS OF OWNER OPERATED MINI-BUSES (PICK-UP TRUCKS MODIFIED TO ACCOMMODATE PASSENGERS) THAT CAME IN FROM THE PROVINCES TO PROFIT FROM THE STRIKE. AN ADDITIONAL SIXTY BUSES WERE PROVIDED BY THE THAI MILITARY. VIOLENCE WAS MINIMAL, ALTHOUGH POLICE ARRESTED APPROXIMATELY TWENTY STRIKERS FOR ASSAULT AND OTHER ACTS OF HARASSMENT AGAINST THE OPERATORS AND PASSENGERS OF THE NON-STRIKING BUSES.

3. SUNDAY AFTERNOON, SEPTEMBER 21, THE PRIME MINISTER AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE POLICE, MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS SIRI SIRIYOTHIN AND THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE LABOR DEPARTMENT MET WITH A BUSMEN'S DELEGATION AND WORKED OUT AN AGREEMENT FOR
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RESUMPTION OF COMPLETE BUS SERVICE. UNDER THE AGREEMENT BUSMEN

WILL BE REPRESENTED ON THE MANAGEMENT BOARD OF THE NEW COMPANY (REFTEL), WORKERS WILL BE COMPENSATED AT A LEVEL EQUAL TO THAT RECEIVED BY EMPLOYEES OF THE MOST GENEROUS OF THE MERGED COMPANIES AND SHOULD THE NEW 51 PERCENT GOVERNMENT-OWNED COMPANY BE UNABLE TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE SERVICE THE GOVERNMENT WILL TAKE STEPS TO CREATE A WHOLLY-OWNED GOVERNMENT ENTERPRISE.

4. COMMENT: THE PRIME MINISTER OFFERED THE LEADERSHIP OF THE STRIKING BUSMEN A FACE-SAVING WAY OUT OF AN UNCOMFORTABLE POSITION. THE SETTLEMENT GRANTED LITTLE MORE THAN HAD BEEN EXPLICITLY STATED OR IMPLIED WHEN THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THE MERGER SCHEME LAST WEEK. THE BUS STRIKE IS ALSO OF POLITICAL INTEREST, FOLLOWING THE STRIKES AMONG POSTAL WORKERS AND RECENT UNREST IN THE TELEPHONE ORGANIZATION OF THAILAND, BECAUSE ALL THESE CONTROVERSIES HIT THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION AND MINISTER SIRI AT A TIME WHEN THE THAI NATION PARTY HAS TRIED TO BUTTRESS ITS POSITION FOR THE IMPENDING CABINET RESHUFFLE.
MASTERS

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